



LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Iowa Department of Education

The Effectiveness of School District Sharing

➔ What is this issue?

Sharing is one strategy Iowa school districts have used over the years to save costs. In 2001, the Iowa Department of Education (Department) conducted a “School District Reorganization and Sharing Incentive Study.” There were 438 school districts in 1983-1984. By 2000-2001, 121 of the 438 districts had reorganized and two districts had dissolved.

Of the 174 districts involved only in administrative sharing, 12 or 7 percent reorganized. Of the 21 districts that only participated in whole grade sharing, 9 or 43 percent reorganized. Of the 128 districts that participated in *both* administrative and whole grade sharing, 94 or 73 percent reorganized.

From these historical data, it appears that whole grade sharing, not administrative sharing, is the driver in leading to reorganization. It must be noted that the greatest success for reorganization comes when *both* types of sharing occurred simultaneously. However, when these two types of sharing existed independently, it is clear that only a very small percentage of administrative sharing — only 7 percent — ever led to reorganization.

Activity During Fiscal Years 1983-1984 to 2000-2001 (438 Districts in FY 1983-1984)			
Activity	Number of Districts		
	Total Number of Districts	Did NOT Reorganize	Reorganized
Participated ONLY in Administrative Sharing	174	162	12
Participated ONLY in Whole Grade Sharing	21	12	9
Participated in BOTH Whole Grade Sharing and Administrative Sharing	128	34	94
Participated in NEITHER Whole Grade Sharing nor Administrative Sharing	113	107	6
Total Number of Districts	436	315	121
*Two districts dissolved in this period, one of which participated in administrative sharing.			

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➔ Where does this issue currently stand?

For districts operating with grades kindergarten through 12 since 2001, there have been six reorganizations, two dissolutions, and one involuntary merger since 2001. In five of the six reorganizations, both partners were involved in sharing prior to reorganization. In the sixth, one of the two partners was involved in sharing. (As a point of clarification, sharing can go in “multiple directions” with multiple partners, but reorganizations rarely involve more than two districts.) Two other reorganizations between two sets of whole grade sharing partners have been approved for July 1, 2009, and July 1, 2010 by voters.

The last year of administrative sharing was in FY1998. Operational sharing, which is equivalent to administrative sharing in its composition, was not in effect until FY2008. Therefore, comparisons between the two type’s effectiveness in resulting in reorganization would not be meaningful. Whole grade sharing has been the only supplementary weighting in place since the study to incent districts into reorganization.

Operational sharing has been primarily leveraged by small- to medium-size districts, which are those districts with less than 1,509 and 1,523 actual enrollment in FY2008 and FY2009, respectively. The use of this type of sharing has grown significantly in these two years from 48 to 73 districts and from \$2.7 million to \$5 million. Correspondingly, this type of sharing jumped from 14 percent of total supplementary weighting dollars to 20 percent.

From this data, several observations can be made:

- Whole grade sharing appears to be the type of sharing that needs to be present to have the highest probability of reorganization — it’s the best incentive. Historical data support this observation.
- The conjecture is that operational sharing or administrative sharing between superintendents, the leaders at the top, can lead to reorganization in these types of sharing arrangements. Administrative/operational sharing may help, but it does not appear to have the same effect as whole grade sharing. It will be important to continue to study operational sharing over time independently and as a supplement to other types of sharing.
- One possible addition to whole grade sharing that may improve its effectiveness would be to commit the effected boards to a reorganization vote upon taking the third and final year of sharing money that is available prior to reorganization. Currently districts must only show progress toward reorganization to continue to receive the whole grade supplementary weighting that is available prior to reorganization.

➔ Where can I get more information?

Please contact the Iowa Department of Education at (515) 281-5293.